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ABSTRACT

Stating that man's intellectual and spiritual horizons need to be expanded through educational programs and approaches in cross-cultural understanding, the author claims that a greater world perspective is attained through the study of social studies, foreign language, English, fine arts, and science, particularly in interdisciplinary programs. The Whorfian hypothesis of language and culture is reviewed, citing France as an example, in a discussion of values. Relevance, communication, provincialism, ethnocentricism, world community, sociocultural context, anthropology, and formal and deep culture are concepts discussed in the address. (RL)

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Teaching for Cross-Cultural Understanding

an address

by

Tora Tuve Ladn

for

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TEACHING FOR CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

Last week an interesting new bulletin reached my desk. It was published by the Commission on Secondary Schools of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. On the cover is a striking picture of a blue and white, slightly distorted, sphere, with the top edge fading into the large black square that is its background. The title of the bulletin is Adventure on a Blue Marble.

This bright blue marble called earth is a small planet in our solar system in a vast galaxy of stars occupied by the solar system. A hundred billion other stars make up this system and there are untold numbers of such groupings. On this small bit of galactic dust is found a species that, as far as we know, is unique -- mankind.

On the title page of the first chapter of this bulletin we read: "To see the earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold -- brothers who know now they are truly brothers." Written by Archibald MacLeish following the telecast from the Apollo 8 spaceship on Christmas Eve, 1968.

In the last third of the twentieth century, teachers and administrators who shape the American curriculum are re-examining the place of foreign languages in the schools -- and colleges; and in that connection, they are taking a fresh look at the contribution of the language sequences toward cross-cultural understanding and communication.

The cultural dimension of language teaching is a consideration in its acceptance by administrators and teachers of other subjects,

because we are led (by the national need) to claim that language teaching is an effective means not only to communication in a narrow sense, but to mutual understanding between bearers of differing cultures.

The role of the study of other cultures has been considered by American educators for a great many years. Bernard Moses, who offered the first university course in Latin American history in the United States--in 1895 at Berkeley--expressed well the basic reason for Americans to study other cultures in an address in Los Angeles in 1898, entitled "The Neglected Half of American History." He urged that we study the history of the whole American continent, "to prevent us from falling into what we may call a national provincialism. . . To check the tendency to narrowness and provincialism is one of the most important tasks developing upon the schools." At a time when the Spanish-American War was imminent, Professor Moses urged his listeners "to devote a portion of their energies to a consideration of the social and political achievements of our prospective enemy."*

We will readily admit, I'm sure, that most peoples tend naturally to emphasize their own civilization, their own achievements, and that they are usually convinced that their own ways of doing things are best.

The influence of cultural nationalism has never been stated more clearly than by Herodotus, the Father of History. After visiting the Egyptians, he concluded that they were a puzzling people. Women went to market in Egypt while the men remained at home to weave.

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*Lewis Hanke, "A Window on the World," address delivered at the California Council of Foreign Language Teachers Association, November, 1967.

Just the opposite occurred in Greece. And, most strange, the Egyptians wrote from right to left. He noted, however, the surprise of the Egyptians at his observations concerning their writing habits. It was not they who were strange, the Egyptians maintained, who wrote from right to left, but the Greeks, who wrote from left to right. Thus it is that this kind of ethnocentrism has existed for a long time and one should not be surprised to find it a powerful force today in every part of the globe. All students, therefore, need to have "windows on the world" opened up for them to allow them to learn about other people, other cultures, and other points of view,* which will lead them to discover that all cultures are basically wondrous varieties of ways in which man everywhere formulates and deals with problems that are essentially our own.

On a visit to the wonderful new museum of anthropology in Mexico City, when leaving the section on ethnology, I was particularly impressed by the summaries printed on large posters just before the exit. One of the statements was (in translation): "All men resolve the same needs with different resources and in different ways. All cultures are equally valid."

Today, the rationale for developing a world consciousness among students is a pragmatic one: society demands it. The growing interdependence of the world community is an established fact. President Kennedy, in one of his addresses on foreign policy, spoke of the need for a new "Declaration of Interdependence." In the past, so-called grass-fire wars tended to be confined to a relatively small geographic area until they had run their course. Now every sizeable

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*Hanke, ibid.

conflagration in any part of the world is a real or potential threat to all of the rest of the world.*

The cliché about the "world getting smaller" is, even in its figurative sense, misleading. In a real sense the world scene is becoming vastly enlarged in several ways--by the emergence of new sovereign nations, each demanding its place in the sun; by the growing complexity of international political, economic, and cultural relations; and by the practically instantaneous network of world-wide communications. There may be some validity in the concept of a shrinking world to an airlines pilot or an astronaut, but to the educator, world affairs have exploded to incredibly vast and complex dimensions. The new global mobility, instantaneous communications and nearly instant destruction have created a situation of great fluidity and have resulted in the greatest interchange of people, goods and ideas in the history of the earth.

How can the high school curriculum cope with the problem of developing some degree of world perspective among students? The major avenues, it seems, must be through the various courses in social studies, foreign languages, English, fine arts, and science.

People and their ways of living and thinking give us a clue to the national character of a society. To know about a people's basic nature and beliefs is to get to the heart of understanding that society. Perhaps this is the most difficult of all aspects of learning for a typical secondary student to grasp, since it is certainly the most abstract, and Americans do not like abstractions. Yet the

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*Wesley and Wronski, Teaching Social Studies in High School. Heath, 1964.

behavior of people acting collectively as a nation cannot be understood without some knowledge of their fundamental commitments.

An intensive study of a given area, for example, should enable the student to grasp one very significant concept at least, namely, that there is an infinite variety of ways to organize societies. We ourselves must recognize that our own pattern of organization is not the only possible way and that it probably will not be a permanent pattern.

Prominent among formulations of objectives in foreign language teaching we usually find some such statement as the following: "To increase international understanding by enabling the student to enter into the life, thought, and literature of people who speak another language." The Modern Language Association's policy statement, "Foreign Languages and International Understanding" issued in September, 1956, listed three contributions which foreign language learning can make to the achievement of international understanding and cooperation: "Direct intercultural communication . . . Experience of a foreign culture . . . Information about a foreign culture," and adds: "The third contribution of language learning to international understanding would be inefficient, were it not for the two other contributions which it uniquely makes." Social studies and humanities sequences can contribute large parts of the necessary body of concepts and information to the study of foreign cultures. The language teacher, however, is in the ideal position to give both experience of and knowledge about one foreign people, the only sound basis for social studies generalizations about similarities and differences among cultures and societies.

In the past, teachers of foreign languages have tried to develop an interest in the culture of the countries of the target language

through some study of the history, geography, monuments, customs, music, and art. The value of this study is unquestioned, but it generally represents distant times, places, and things, whereas the language itself, which is the vehicle of the foreign culture, is always immediately available in the classroom. In the everyday use of the language are reflected certain values and sociocultural features that have often been overlooked in teaching. Anthropologists define "culture" as "the sum of attainments and the learned behavior patterns of any specific period, race, or people." To be more explicit, in the words of Nelson Brooks, "The word 'culture' must now be used to signal, on the one hand, social, intellectual, and artistic achievements of the highest order; and on the other, a totality of beliefs and thoughts and actions, grandiose and minute, fantastic and practical, heroic, shocking, and banal, good, bad and indifferent -- a total human story of a human community."*

Culture in the sense of the achievements of a people is often referred to as "formal" culture. Culture referring to the patterned ways of behavior, including the thought processes and beliefs, of a given people has been given the name "deep culture." It is this latter definition of culture with which we are especially concerned today. Because it is the most abstract and therefore the most difficult to understand, opportunities for teaching it have often been overlooked. Language cannot be separated completely from the culture in which it is deeply embedded. Any authentic use of the

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*Brooks, Nelson, "Culture and Language Instruction, Teacher's Notebook, Spring 1966. Harcourt, Brace & World.

language, any reading of original texts (as opposed to those fabricated for classroom use), any listening to the utterances of native speakers, will introduce cultural concomitants into the classroom whether the teacher is conscious of them or not. In not making them explicit the teacher permits misconceptions to develop in the students' minds. Mere fluency in the production of foreign language utterances without any awareness of their implications or of their appropriate use, the reading of texts without a realization of the underlying values and assumptions -- in short, the development of so-called communication skills without their accompanying understandings -- might well call into question the claim of foreign language study to a place in a program of liberal education.

About 25 years ago Wharf and his great teacher Sapir married language and culture in their famous hypothesis that language is not something which only expresses thought but which to a very large extent determines thought. In the intervening years there has been a great revolution in language study led by the structuralists, a revolution that has been exceedingly beneficial from the point of view of describing language and giving the language teacher the basic tools. But the revolution has also tended to take the teacher and the researcher away from this marriage of language and culture into the grammatical and lexical phases of language which have very little to do with how people think and act, and what they value.

Mr. Edmund Glenn, Chief of Interpreting Services for the United States Department of State, addressed our State Foreign Language Conference in North Carolina two years ago. In connection with his work in the supervision of some 700 escort interpreters, Mr. Glenn was brought into contact with cultural, rather than simply linguistic,

barriers to communication and decided to undertake a series of research projects concerning this problem. He described the process of subjecting translations, which were done for the purpose of communication, to a detailed analysis to see what the language suggested in the thought patterns of a people, such as fondness for deductive reasoning from the abstract toward the concrete, or the inductive, from the concrete toward the abstract, or even simply the concrete. He stated that not only in language but in areas of culture such as the system of public administration and the system of laws, the deductive or the inductive system is prevalent according to the preference expressed in the thought and language patterns. One can observe cultural traits which may parallel linguistic distinctions. Mr. Glenn emphasized that "If you want to be understood, truly understood, by people of a different culture, of a different language, it is not enough to use their vocabulary, their grammar, and even their pronunciation. You also have to use their logic. Otherwise, they will not understand you."

Students today are demanding relevance in the curriculum. Perhaps foreign languages have been among the worst of the irrelevancies in the past. We need to make the foreign language sequence as rich as we can to meet the demands of students for relevance. Every foreign language teacher will need to keep learning more about the foreign country, doing in-depth study of the central aspects of its culture and to keep following interesting developments to show the student how these relate to today, pointing out similarities between the foreign culture and our own.

Cultures must be studied as wholes. No custom, belief, or behavior can be understood out of its sociocultural context. That is, any item of behavior, any tradition or pattern can be evaluated

correctly only in the light of its meaning to the people who practice it, its relation to other elements of the culture, and the part it plays in the adaptation of the people to their environment or to one another. No custom is "odd" to the people who practice it.

"Any people's heritage is to them what 'The American Way', in its best sense, is to us Americans. For us it is the Pilgrim Fathers and Thanksgiving Day, the Boston Tea Party and the Fourth of July George Washington and a cherry tree, Abraham Lincoln and a log cabin. It is Santa Claus and a manger, Easter lilies and Easter rabbits, the flag, Coney Island, camp meetings, Sunday dinner, fried chicken, ice cream and apple pie. It is 'Yankee Doodle','Tipperary' and My Old Kentucky Home'. It is a thousand and one things sublime and ridiculous, good and bad, mythical and real, that make us a people and not merely an aggregate of individuals whose ancestors came from just about everywhere. Many of these patterns have come to us from other peoples but we have made them peculiarly our own."*

It is a common social heritage that makes for cohesion and solidarity and that thus helps insure the continuity of group life. It is in this heritage that each new generation finds its value system and its assumptions of reality.

Every society has a system of values -- a set of interrelated ideas and practices, (conscious or unconscious), which direct how one should act, and to which strong sentiments are attached.

The anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn state: "Values are important in that they provide foci for patterns of organization for

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*Brown, Ina Corinne, Understanding Other Cultures. Prentice-Hall, 1963. P. 14.

the material of cultures. They give significance to our understanding of cultures. In fact, values provide the only basis for the fully intelligible comprehension of culture, because the actual organization of all cultures is primarily in terms of their values. This becomes apparent as soon as one attempts to present the picture of a culture without reference to its values. The account becomes an unstructured, meaningless assemblage of items having relation to one another only through coexistence in locality and moment -- an assemblage that might as profitably be arranged alphabetically as in another order; a mere laundry list."*

Describing the "life-style" of a people is complicated by the rapid evolution that all nations are undergoing today. It is necessary to consider the contrast between those contemporaries who remain attached to the norms of the past, those who adopt the new values, and the eclectics who seek to adapt the best of tradition to the exigencies of modern life. In other words, we must look at the conservative face of a nation and also the other face that shows the effect of supranational forces which today are modifying the character of every nation.

Lest all of this seem too vague I should like to cite an example of how a value of a society is reflected as a theme in some of its arts and its social structures.

In French culture, intellectuality is a dominant quality.

This theme has sometimes been called "method" or "reason."

The French mentality is distinguished by its conscious preoccupation

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*Kroeber, A. L. and Clyde Kluckhohn, Culture. Vintage Books, 1952, p. 309.

with intellectual methods: methods for observing closely, reasoning logically, and expressing exactly one's thoughts and ideas. The French have developed to a high degree the art of observing human nature and of examining it methodically, on an intellectual level. The Frenchman savors the paradox, the witticism, the "jeu d'idées." He has a high regard for the intellectual and for the education that shapes him. Despite the greater preoccupation today with the practical and the material life, intellectuality persists in the French mentality as a national quality justly admired by the foreign observer.

This outstanding trait of the French personality -- reason-- is reflected in its literature. The effort to study man has been the motivation and activity of the French literary mind. Prepared by Montaigne, formulated by Descartes, rationalism is the leading thread of French thought and French literature, which has from one century to another given rise to writers, preoccupied above all with trying to define humanism, wisdom, and the art of living.

The traditional music of France, like her painting, her architecture, her sculpture, and her literature appeals primarily to the rational element in man. It prides itself on being intellectual and descriptive. Unlike German music, it is more imaginative than emotional, with always a careful concern for craftsmanship, for developing the form of a composition, for "élégance." These qualities may be found elsewhere but they are always there in the French arts.

Language is the image of a mentality and a culture. French is an analytical language especially adapted to expression of the abstract and of subtle nuances, by virtue of its prepositions and many small versatile "mots de liaison." It prefers simple, short words,

bearers of ideas rather than images. The form of the French sentence obeys a strict and rational order. Use of the language requires both finesse and precision.

Education in France has generally been for the more intellectual type of student. The curriculum in the secondary schools (other than the purely vocational ones) may be characterized as general, abstract, and noncontroversial, rather more divorced from actual life requirements than instruction in other industrial countries. It aims primarily at shaping sound, analytical, logical minds, at developing a "sens critique." This "sens critique," so basic to French education, means a sound, objective and well-grounded judgment which is the result of thorough analysis followed by a synthesis which grasps the main features, the determining factors. This is why, faced with a problem, the Frenchman tries to reduce it to first principles, to discover the pattern underlying it. This is also why, for a Frenchman, the exchange of ideas does not rank as conversation. A fact will be of interest only if it can be used as the springboard for an original or witty idea, or if it brings a new light on a given situation.

We could continue to follow the idea of intellectuality, reason, method and logical thinking in other arts and social structures of French culture, but these brief explanations will serve perhaps to illustrate what is meant by a study of a value system as the basis for all social behavior, the cultural inner life and the creative works of bearers of that culture. Such study will bring out elements of our own culture that we are not aware of until we study models of behavior. Thus, opening a window on the world will also serve as a mirror to understand better our own culture and subcultures.

To make the curriculum relevant for today's youth we can no longer depend on fragmented teaching, where each discipline develops in its own traditional manner. There must be a welding of languages and related disciplines into a new synthesis which will make international studies on all levels of education more relevant. These innovative approaches may take the form of interdisciplinary team-planning (since real team-teaching is not possible because of the language), or sequential approaches to language and international studies beginning in the early grades.

We can envision the instructional materials and methods of the future as presenting foreign cultures in small units in the same way as the language itself has been reduced to presentable small patterns. Just as now we have pattern drills of language, some day there may be pattern drills of culture reduced to visuals which are microcosms of culture rather than one-dimensional units out of context. Instead of being an outside observer, the student will be a participant in a foreign scene. The language methods of the future will recreate for each student the complete atmosphere which envelops language in its natural habitat. Already technology has produced media of instruction that have gone far beyond anyone's dreams of a few years ago.

I happened to be in Colombia, South America, at the time of the landing on the moon of Apollo 11. Emotion was at a high pitch as crowds of people gathered in hotel lobbies, in public parks, outside store windows where television sets had been placed, and in any other places where it was possible to follow these history-making events on television. Wherever we went in the following weeks, people talked

about the moon-landing, and congratulated us as representatives of the country that had accomplished this great feat. Newspapers and magazines of each country had devoted most of an issue to the news coverage and photographs; children in the schools had made scrapbooks about it.

It seemed that most of the world had stopped for a moment in time to view with intense interest, admiration, and excitement man's conquest of space and victory over the forces of the universe. Perhaps they too were thinking, as did Archibald MacLeish, that all are "brothers who know now they are truly brothers." This great scientific and technological progress has the potential for uniting the world in a common goal of peace or for the destruction of our civilization as we know it. It is imperative, therefore, that equal progress be made in the social sciences and in the humanities in order to extend man's intellectual and spiritual horizons as science has extended physical horizons. Surely this is a tremendous challenge for all of us responsible for curriculum planning -- to provide in our American education the relevance for today's youth in our extended world.